

THE SONG WRITERS OF AMERICA.

POESY is the daughter of the gods. The divinest faculty of man is the gift of song. If there is any thing that links us to the angels it is our longing for supernal beauty—a longing which we seek to gratify in music, in painting, in earthly loveliness, but most of all in poetry. To appease this wild thirst for things brighter than are afforded by our present state of existence, we invest mortal beings with the attributes of the celestial world, surrounding them with a beauty which is a part of the cherubims, and dignifying them with a purity that blooms only by the rivers of Paradise. To the eye of the poet the commonest things of life have a loveliness greater than the loveliest things of earth to the eye of the uninspired. His own glorious spirit bathes every thing he looks upon in an effulgence like that which the arch-angel's countenance sheds around whatever he beholds. There is not a leaf that rustles in the wood, nor a wave that sparkles in the sun, nor a bird that sings in the thicket, nor a flower that lifts its face to the summer sky and smiles, but is not to the poet more beautiful than the most glorious visions are to the mere "hewer of wood and drower of water" of earth. A ripple, a dew-drop, the tinkle of a waterfall, the song of a child at play in the woods, a star, a passing bird, whatever there is of this world to gladden the heart of man with glimpses of supernal beauty, stirs ten thousand fine chords in the bosom of the poet, and makes all time tremulous with a strain that vibrates throughout nature, and for aught we know, may reach into eternity itself. He, who has the faculty of song, carries with him a safeguard against the ills of this life. He has wings given to him to soar above all that is mean in earth, and, it is his own fault if ever he soils his plumage, or fails to drink, far up in the illimitable ether, the dew wept by the stars. God made man for immortality, and though he has allotted us our first home here, it is only that we may deserve our heritage by spurning the dross of earth and winging our way above. And Poesy is our mistress to bid us fix our eyes on heaven, and plume ourselves for the flight.

Where are the poets of old? Their mortal bodies sleep by the shores of Greece, on the hills of Italy, in the quiet minsters of our fatherland; but their souls are still with us, in those immortal works, which they have left behind. Hear you not the blind old man of Scio, as he was heard of yore in the cities of Greece, speaking in the self same tones as when he thrilled the sons of the *Æacides* with their ancestors' deeds? Underneath his loved foliage have we sat for hours with the Bard of Mantua, listening to the silver melody of his pipe, as he recited the sacking of Illium, or lamented over the melancholy love of Dido. Oh! have you not heard Petrarch sing of Laura? Have you not felt with Dante the

shaggy aides of Lucifer? You have walked with Milton hand in hand along the flowery banks of Eden, or gazed breathlessly down into the lake of fire where writhed Satan and his hosts. With Rosalind we have roamed the forest of Ardenææ. We have seen the unspotted Imogen asleep in her chamber which her holy breath perfumed. We have heard the midnight terrors of Richard, have seen the horror-struck Macbeth, have spoken as Hamlet spoke with a visitant from the tomb. We have soared with Ariel to the skies. And with the blind old man we have heard the harp before the eternal throne, and seen the gleaming of the white wings of angels, and the robes of the redeemed: and long ages after we are dead the world will still hear the divine music of the poets, and catch glimpses of Paradise from the calm, ineffable faces of these prophets of God. Poesy comes from the skies and is eternal.

The song-writer is as much a poet as the composer of an epic, and, in his peculiar department, may evince an equal genius. The nobility of sentiment, the beauty of the imagery, the finish and purity of the style which constitute the merits of the epic are essential to the song; and the true poet will infuse them into the lyric as fully and triumphantly as into a longer poem. Genius bathes whatever it touches with glory. It matters not whether Apollo awakes his own celestial lyre, or touches the rude fibres of the shell on the sea-shore; he brings music alike from either; for it is the fingers of the god and not the instrument in which the harmony resides. In judging of a song, therefore, we must not abate one whit the rigid canons by which we judge an epic: indeed if either requires the higher polish it is the song, just as in painting, the lines of a miniature ought to be more exquisitely pencilled than those of a full length portrait. The great old masters have left na nothing which is not as elaborately finished in its detail as it is simple in its general effect.

The song-writers of our country are but little, if at all inferior to those of England. We have no Shakspeare, nor Milton, nor Spencer; but we have our Herrick and our Waller. We number among our sons many who have asserted for themselves a high station in the sacerdotal throng, and who have waited at the altar in robes only less resplendent than those of the high priests of Poesy. Noble and worthy are these children of our common country, and long shall they be held in remembrance among us. To some have been given the highest powers of song, and sweetly have they sung far up and out of sight in heaven. On others a less beatific inspiration has descended, and they have warbled their lays along the hedge-rows, and by the sedgy margins of streams. But all have had more or less of the divine faculty, have given us brighter or dimmer glimpses of Paradise, have lifted our souls above the littlenesses and sorrows of this world, and thrilled it with celestial sights

and sounds. To spend an hour with *THE SONG-WRITERS OF AMERICA* is to hold delightful communion with some of the sweetest ministers unto Poesy. From a crowd of lyrics on our table we shall select a few of the most choice.

Foremost in the group, both on account of its merit and the period at which it was written, we quote the exquisite song of Dr. Shaw. This gentleman died in 1809, and the song that follows was written many years before. It has touches in it that equal Shakspeare; and is, perhaps, surpassed by few lyrics of the kind in the language.

SONO.

Who has robb'd the ocean cave,
To tinge thy lips with coral hue?
Who from India's distant wave,
For thee, those pearly treasures drew?
Who, from yonder orient sky,
Stole the morning of thine eye?

Thousand charms, thy form to deck,
For sea, and earth, and air are torn;
Roses bloom upon thy cheek,
On thy breath their fragrance borne.
Guard thy bosom from the day,
Lest thy snows should melt away.

But one charm remains behind,
Which mute earth can ne'er impart;
Nor in ocean wilt thou find,
Nor in the circling air a heart:
Fairest, wouldst thou perfect be,
Take, O take that heart from me.

This, however, is the only song of high merit written by Dr. Shaw, and as a song-writer he is decidedly inferior to Pinkney, who, by his fertility as well as by the high merit of his songs, has raised himself to a pinnacle where, as yet, he sits without a rival. Pinkney died in 1828, at the early age of twenty-six, but he has left behind him several pieces which will, if possible, outlive the language. He had much of the exquisite simplicity and high finish combined—that rare union of the two highest merits of a song—which distinguished the old writers. Few poets have equalled Pinkney in their lighter pieces. Here is one of remarkable simplicity, yet, when you come to examine it, how elaborate in every part. Mark how exquisite is the turn of the sentiment—and yet with what an easy grace it is managed!

SONG.

We break the glass, whose sacred wine,
To some beloved health we drain.
Lest future pledges, less divine,
Should e'er the hallow'd toy profane;
And thus I broke a heart that pour'd
Its tide of feelings out for thee,
In draughts, by after-time deplored,
Yet dear to memory.

But still the old, impassion'd ways
And habits of my mind remain,
And still unhappy light displays
Thine image chamber'd in my brain.

And still it looks as when the hours
Went by like flights of singing birds,
Or that soft chain of spoken flowers,
And airy gems—thy words.

There is a very fine song of five stanzas, entitled "A Health," but it must give place to that most beautiful of all Pinkney's shorter poems, "A Picture Song." We know of no song of equal length, written by any American poet, which can at all compare with this inimitable piece; and we might search long among the writings of England's sweetest bards before we could discover any thing to equal it.

A PICTURE SONG.

How may this little tablet feign
The features of a face,
Which o'er informs with loveliness,
Its proper share of space;
Or human hands on ivory,
Enable us to see
Thy charms, that all must wonder at,
Thou work of gods in thee!

But yet, methinks, that sunny smile
Familiar stories tell,
And I should know those placid eyes,
Two shaded crystal wells;
Nor can my soul, the limner's art
Attesting with a sigh,
Forget the blood that deck'd thy cheek,
As rosy clouds the sky.

They could not seemle what thou art,
More excellent than fair,
As soft as sleep or pity is,
And pure as mountain-air;
But here are common, earthly hues,
To such an aspect wrought,
That none, save thine, can seem so like
The beautiful of thought.

The song I sing, thy likeness like,
Is painful mimicry
Of something better, which is now
A memory to me,
Who have upon life's frozen sea
Arrived the icy spot,
Where man's magnetic feelings show
Their guiding task forgot.

The sportive hopes, that used to chase
Their shifting shadows on,
Like children playing in the sun,
Are gone—forever gone;
And on a careless, aullen peace,
My double-fronted mind,
Like JANUS when his gates were shut,
Looks forward and behind.

APOLLO placed his harp, of old,
A while upon a stone,
Which has resounded since, when struck,
A breaking harp-string's tone;
And thus my heart, though wholly now,
From early softness free,
If touch'd, will yield the music yet,
It first received of thee.

We cannot dismiss Pinkney without giving place to his "Serenade," a song which is only not faultless, because it is so studded with beauties, so crowded with brilliants, that the eye is dazzled in contemplating it.

and would fain have a momentary relief by gazing on something less splendid.

S E R E N A D E .

Look out upon the stars, my love,
And shame them with thine eyes,
On which, than on the lights above,
There hang more destinies.
Night's beauty is the harmony
Of blending shades and light;
Then, lady, up,—look out, and be
A sister to the night!—

Sleep not!—thine image wakes for aye
Within my watching breast:
Sleep not!—from her soft sleep should fly,
Who robs all hearts of rest.
Nay, lady, from thy slumbers break,
And make this darkness gay
With looks, whose brightness well might make
Of darker nights a day.

In direct contrast to Pinkney, let us take up Charles Fenno Hoffman. This gentleman has written many fine songs, and seems to have written them much as Pinkney wrote his, for both writers evince artistic skill to a high degree in their lyrics. But Pinkney has soared to a height to which Hoffman has yet to aspire. The former has nearly, some would say altogether attained that point in art where art seems nature; and accordingly, united to much ornamentation in detail, we have as the general effect, in Pinkney's songs, a chaste and severe simplicity. As Demosthenes was to other orators so is Pinkney to other song writers. Hoffman, on the contrary, betrays his art in every line; and although there is a freedom in his songs as if they were written *con amore*, yet that freedom walks in jewelled apparel, and regulates her steps according to the last lesson of the dancing master. There is no such thing as simplicity in Hoffman's songs. They are all "sparkling and bright" as the wine he loves to commemorate, or the bright eyes it is his delight to extol. He resembles Moore in many things, but we question if he produces his songs with the labor and time of his master. Hoffman has caught his style from reading the "Irish Melodies," rather than the songs of Herrick, and he writes unconsciously after the more bastard style of the former. There is too much obtrusive epigrammatic turn, too much mock sentiment, too much of what we should call balderdash about the songs of Hoffman. Yet he has written many fine lyrics. In some of his better moments he has soared to the atmosphere of Waller, but he has soon returned with drooping and weary wing. We like best those of his lyrics which relate to war and wine—in his songs to the other sex he speaks after too mincing a fashion. But for the songs. And first we will give one of his gayest.

S P A R K L I N G A N D B R I G H T .

SPARKLING and bright in liquid light
Does the wine our goblets gleam in,
With hue as red as the rosy bed
Which a bee would choose to dream in.

Then fill to-night with hearts as light,
To loves as gay and fleeting
As bubbles that swim on the beaker's brim,
And break on the lips while meeting.

O! if Mirth might arrest the flight
Of Time through Life's dominions,
We here a while would now beguile
The graybeard of his pinions,
To drink to-night with hearts as light,
To loves as gay and fleeting
As bubbles that swim on the beaker's brim,
And break on the lips while meeting.

But since delight can't tempt the wight,
Nor fond regret delay him,
Nor Love himself can hold the elf,
Nor sober Friendship stay him,
We'll drink to-night with hearts as light,
To loves as gay and fleeting
As bubbles that swim on the beaker's brim,
And break on the lips while meeting.

After a song on wine what is more appropriate than one on war; and here is "The Myrtle and Steel."

T H E M Y R T L E A N D S T E E L .

ONE bumper yet, gallants, at parting,
One toast ere we arm for the fight;
Fill round, each to her he loves dearest—
'Tis the last he may pledge her, to-night.
Think of those who of old at the banquet
Did their weapons in garlands conceal,
The patriot heroes who hallowed
The entwining of myrtle and steel!
Then hey for the myrtle and steel,
Then ho for the myrtle and steel,
Let every true blade that e'er loved a fair maid,
Fill round to the myrtle and steel!

'Tis in moments like this, when each bosom
With its highest-toned feeling is warm,
Like the music that's said from the ocean
To rise ere the gathering storm,
That her image around us should hover,
Whose name, though our lips ne'er reveal,
We may breathe mid the foam of a bumper,
As we drink to the myrtle and steel.
Then hey for the myrtle and steel,
Then ho for the myrtle and steel,
Let every true blade that e'er loved a fair maid,
Fill round to the myrtle and steel!

Now mount, for our hughie is ringing
To marshal the host for the fray,
Where proudly our banner is flinging
Its folds o'er the battle-array;
Ye gallants—one moment—remember,
When your sabres the death-blow would deal,
That MERCY wears her shape who's cherish'd
By lads of the myrtle and steel.
Then hey for the myrtle and steel,
Then ho for the myrtle and steel,
Let every true blade that e'er loved a fair maid,
Fill round to the myrtle and steel!

We were about to pass on, but we will give one more; and let it be "Rossie Clare"—a friend beside us insisting that it is one of the finest of Hoffman's songs. It sounds to us too much *a la* Lochinvar.

R O S A L I E C L A R E .

Who owns not she's peerless, who calls her not fair,
Who questions the beauty of ROSALIE CLARE?
Let him saddle his courser and spur to the field,
And, though harness'd in proof, he must perish or yield;
For no gallant can splinter, no charger may dare
The lance that is couched for young ROSALIE CLARE.

When goblets are flowing, and wit at the board
Sparkles high, while the blood of the red grape is pour'd,
And fond wishes for fair ones around offer'd up
From each lip that is wat with the dew of the cup,
What name on the brimmer floats oftener there,
Or is whisper'd more warmly, than ROSALIE CLARE?

They may talk of the land of the olive and vine,
Of the maids of the Ebro, the Arno, or Rhine;
Of the hours that gladden the East with their smiles,
Where the sea's studded over with green summer isles;
But what flower of far-away clime can compare
With the blossom of ours—bright ROSALIE CLARE?

Who owns not she's peerless, who calls her not fair?
Let him meet but the glances of ROSALIE CLARE!
Let him list to her voice, let him gaze on her form,
And if, seeing and hearing, his soul do not warm,
Let him go breathe it out in some less happy air
Than that which is bless'd by sweet ROSALIE CLARE.

Gen. Morris has a wide spread popularity as a song writer; but in all the higher elements of the vocation he is inferior to Hoffman, and immeasurably below Pinkney. His most favorite songs have won fame more on account of the theme chosen by the poet, or from the music to which they were linked, than because of their literary merit. "Woodman spare that Tree!" is a familiar instance in support of our remark. Still the songs of Gen. Morris are highly meritorious, and perhaps oftener found in our parlors than those of more literary worth. One of the most spirited of his songs is "Land Ho!"

LAND HO!

Fill high the brimmer!—The land is in sight,
We'll be happy, if never again, boys, to-night:
The cold, cheerless ocean in safety we've pass'd,
And the warm, genial earth glads our vision at last;
In the land of the stranger true hearts we shall find,
To soothe us in absence of those left behind.
Then fill high the brimmer! the land is in sight.
We'll be happy, if never again, boys, to-night!

Fill high the brimmer!—till morn we'll remain,
Then part in the hope to meet one day again,
Round the hearth-stone of home, in the land of our birth,
The holiest spot on the face of the earth!
Dear country! our thoughts are more constant to thee
Than the steel to the star or the stream to the sea.
Then fill up the brimmer! the land is in sight.
We'll be happy, if never again, boys, to-night!

Fill high the brimmer!—the wine-sparkles rise
Like tears, from the fountain of joy, to the eyes!
May rain-drops that fall from the storm-clouds of care,
Melt away in the sun-beaming smiles of the fair!
Drink deep to the chime of the nautical bells,
To woman,—Goo bless her, wherever she dwells!
Then fill high the brimmer! the land is in sight,
We'll be happy, if never again, boys, to-night!

We must hurry on, however, for to enumerate all the popular songs of Gen. Morris would exclude his contemporaries from a place in our gallery.

We come now to the "Florence Vane" of P. P. Coke. Beautiful exceedingly is this song, as a dew-drop in the bosom of the violet, and lovelier and more false than the Aphrodite must have been she who inspired it. It lingers in our memory with a strange tenacity, as

if it were some strain, "once heard in heaven, now heard again."

FLORENCE VANE.

I LOVE thee long and dearly,
Florence Vane;
My life's bright dream and early
Hath come again;
I renew, in my fond vision,
My heart's dear pain,
My hopes and thy derision,
Florence Vane.

The ruin, lone and hoary,
The ruin old
Where thou didst hark my story,
At even told,—
That spot—the hues Elysian
Of sky and plain—
I treasure in my vision,
Florence Vane.

Thou wast lovelier than the roses
In their prime;
Thy voice excell'd the closes
Of sweetest rhyme;
Thy heart was as a river
Without a main.
Would I had loved thee never,
Florence Vane!

But, fairest, coldest, wonder!
Thy glorious clay
Lieth the green sod under—
Alas, the day!
And it boots not to remember
Thy disdain—
To quicken love's pale ember,
Florence Vane.

The lilies of the valley
By young graves weep,
The daisies love to dally
Where maidens sleep;
May their bloom, in beauty vying,
Never wane
Where thine earthly part is lying,
Florence Vane!

Woodworth's "Bucket," (it is the best thing he has written) is known from the highlands of Aroostok to the lagunes of Louisiana. We need scarcely quote a song so extensively known. Often have we heard it away off in some quiet valley of the mountain, where strangers are rarely seen. A lyric which can thus penetrate into the hearts of the people is one of high merit in its way, although it may not be distinguished by all that exquisite finish which will commend it to the man of taste, and ensure it immortality. And in this song it is its truth to nature which has made it such a favorite. Who cannot recall the fidelity of these lines?

THE BUCKET.

How dear to this heart are the scenes of my childhood!
When fond recollection presents them to view;
The orchard, the meadow, the deep tangled wild wood,
And every loved spot which my infancy knew;
The wide-spreading pond, and the mill which stood by it,
The bridge, and the rock where the cataract fell;
The cot of my father, the dairy-house nigh it,
And e'en the rude bucket which hung in the well.
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-cover'd bucket which hung in the well.

That moss-cover'd vessel I hail as a treasure,
 For often at noon, when return'd from the field,
 I found it the source of an exquisite pleasure,
 The purest and sweetest that nature can yield.
 How ardent I seized it with hands that were glowing,
 How quick to the white pebbled bottom it fell,
 Then soon with the emblem of truth overflowing,
 And dripping with coolness, it rose from the well.
 The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
 The moss-cover'd bucket arose from the well.

How sweet from the green mossy brim to receive it,
 As, poised on the curb, it inclined to my lips;
 Not a full blushing goblet could tempt me to leave it.
 Though fill'd with the nectar that JUPITER sips.
 And now, far removed from the loved situation,
 The tear of regret will intrusively swell,
 As fancy reverts to my father's plantation,
 And sighs for the bucket which hangs in the well.
 The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
 The moss-cover'd bucket which hangs in his well.

F. W. Thomas is better known as a novelist than as a song-writer; but if success is any guarantee of merit, the experiment he has made in the latter department would warrant farther essays. His song "'Tis said that Absence conquers Love," was pronounced by the publisher the most popular lyric he had ever issued. Thomas has since written other songs, but their success has not as yet been so decisive. After all, the sentiment of this favorite lyric has been the true secret of its popularity.

'TIS SAID THAT ABSENCE CONQUERS LOVE.

'Tis said that absence conquers love!
 But, O! believe it not;
 I've tried, alas! its power to prove,
 But thou art not forgot.
 Lady, though fate has bid us part,
 Yet still thou art as dear,
 As fix'd in this devoted heart
 As when I clasp'd thee here.

I plunge into the busy crowd,
 And smile to hear thy name;
 And yet, as if I thought aloud,
 They know me still the same.
 And when the wine-cup passes round,
 I toast some other fair,—
 But when I ask my heart the sound,
 Thy name is echo'd there.

And when some other name I learn,
 And try to whisper love,
 Still will my heart to thee return,
 Like the returning dove.
 In vain! I never can forget,
 And would not be forgot;
 For I must bear the same regret,
 What'er may be my lot.

E'en as the wounded bird will seek
 Its favorite bower to die,
 So, lady, I would hear thee speak,
 And yield my parting sigh.
 'Tis said that absence conquers love!
 But, O, believe it not;
 I've tried, alas! its power to prove,
 But thou art not forgot.

Hewitt is a favorite song-writer, and his "Minstrel's Return from the War," which is generally attributed to a foreign source, is certainly a fine lyric. Notwithstanding it is so extensively known we give it here.

THE MINSTREL RETURNED FROM THE WAR.

THE minstrel return'd from the war,
 With spirits as buoyant as air,
 And thus on his tuneful guitar,
 He sung in the bower of his fair,
 "The noise of the battle is over;
 The bugle no more calls to arms,
 A soldier no more, but a lover,
 I bend to the power of thy charms.
 Oh! lady, fair lady, I'm thine;
 I bend to the magic of beauty;
 Tho' the banner and helmet are mine,
 Yet love calls the soldier to duty."

The minstrel his suit warily pressed;
 She blush'd, sighed and hung down her head;
 Till conquer'd, she fell on his breast,
 And thus to the happy youth said:
 "The bugle shall part us, love, never;
 My bosom thy pillow shall be,
 Till death tears thee from me forever;
 Still faithful, I'll perish with thee,
 Sweet lady, fair lady, I'm thine,
 I bend to the magic of beauty;
 Tho' the banner and helmet are mine,
 Yet love calls the soldier to duty."

But fame called the youth to the field:
 His banner waved high o'er his head;
 He gave his guitar for a shield,
 And soon he lay low with the dead;
 While she, o'er her young hero bending,
 Received his expiring adieu;
 "I die whilst my country defending,
 But I die to my lady love true."
 "Oh, death!" then she cried, "I am thine;
 I tear off the roses of beauty;
 The grave of my hero is mine,
 For he died true to love and to duty!"

Hill's "Leila" is a very beautiful song, but it has an unfortunate resemblance to Pinkney's "Health"—an instance, to speak in a paradox, of the strength or weakness of Mr. Hill's memory, we care not which. Were it not for this plagiarism we should speak in terms of unqualified praise of "Leila."

LEILA.

When first you look upon her face
 You little note beside
 The timidity which still betrays
 The beauties it would hide;
 But, one by one, they look out from
 Her blushes and her eyes:
 And still the last the loveliest,
 Like stars from twilight skies.

And thoughts go sporting thro' her mind,
 Like children among flowers:
 And deeds of gentle goodness are
 The measure of her hours.
 In soul or face she bears no trace
 Of one from Eden driven,
 But like the rainbow, seems tho' born
 Of Earth, a part of Heaven.

So thickly do the songs of our poets crowd on us that we are almost dazzled by the continuous splendor of the sight. Our soul dissolves beneath the unceasing music of their lyrics. We must give up the task, although many fine songs remain yet behind. But these we must defer to another occasion.